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SUBJECT: JERUSALEM MEDIA REACTION (8/15): The status of Palestinians in the future Middle East?

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Main Stories:  
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Al-Quds and Al-Hayat Al-Jadida lead with news about Israeli actions in the West Bank. Al-Quds reports that the Land Registration Office at Beit El announced on August 14 the confiscation of 92 dunums of land from the Al-Khudar village near Bethlehem, claiming that these lands either belong to Israel or to Palestinians living abroad. This land confiscation will reportedly allow the expansion of the Israeli Efrat settlement built on Al-Khudar village. In a similar vein, the Israeli authorities reportedly issued an order to confiscate lands in Hebron for "military purposes." According to related coverage, Israeli bulldozers continued to damage farms and rip out olive trees for the third consecutive day in Al-Rumana village, near Jenin, in order to expand an Israeli military training base. Al-Quds and Al-Hayat Al-Jadida report the injury of 15 Palestinians and foreign peace activists, and the arrest of three others, during a peaceful demonstration in Ni'lin village near Ramallah on August 14. Al-Hayat Al-Jadida reports that Israeli forces also injured two Palestinians in the Al-Dheisheh Refugee Camp and arrested ten others in locations across the West Bank on August 14.

All dailies highlight Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's statement that Israeli would refuse to allow the return of 20,000 Palestinian refugees in any peace deal with the Palestinian Authority (PA). The dailies write that the PA Presidency has rejected this declaration and cited a statement by the PA's official spokesperson, published by the official Palestine news agency WAFA, that Olmert's declarations are not acceptable, including those involving Jerusalem and the future Palestinian borders. He added that these declarations are a maneuver to mislead public opinion and hold the Palestinians responsible for any failure in the peace talks. Al-Ayyam quotes the Palestinian Chief Negotiator, Dr. Sa'eb Erekat, as having said in an interview with its correspondent that "we [the

Palestinian Authority] have not received any official Israeli proposals regarding the refugees and we insist on a solution based on the Arab initiative."

The three dailies cover news about the visit of PA President Mahmoud Abbas to the memorial site of the recently deceased Palestinian poet, Mahmoud Darwish, at the Cultural Palace in Ramallah on August 14. Dailies report that Abbas continues to receive condolence letters following the death of Darwish.

Al-Ayyam cites Ma'an in reporting that Fatah accepted on August 14 a proposal made by Palestinian left-wing parties to form a national committee to end the politically-motivated arrest campaign [between Fatah and Hamas]. The agreement was reached following a meeting in the Gaza Strip between Fatah and three left-wing parties: the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), and the Palestinian People's Party (PPP). A member of the Central Committee of the DFLP, Mahmoud Khalaf, announced that Fatah demonstrated readiness to participate in a national committee to end these politically-motivated arrests in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, and that Hamas and other Palestinian factions would be invited to participate in this committee.

Al-Ayyam carries a story first published in the Israeli paper Yediot Ahronot, in which Israeli sources claim that Egypt wishes to broker a deal between Israel and Hamas in November 2008 that would involve the release of the captive Israeli soldier, Gilad Shalit. The Israeli sources said that Hamas continues to insist that its demands be met in any such deal and also demands that Israel re-open the

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Rafah crossing point.

Al-Hayat Al-Jadida reports that the Israeli Deputy Minister for Army Affairs, Matan Vilna'i, announced on August 14 the reopening of the Karam Abu Salem crossing point in the Gaza Strip on August 17. He added that the Sofa crossing point will be gradually closed.

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BLOCK QUOTES:  
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1. Independent Al-Quds runs its daily editorial by Azzam Tawfiq Abu Al-Su'oud entitled, "Will there be a New Middle East?" (8/15):  
"Since the beginning of [Bush's] presence in the White House, we have heard about American plans for a new Middle East ... We are accustomed to the idea that the American strategy does not change according to who runs the U.S.A ... So, we do not expect any changes as a result of the coming presidential elections. So, the American attempts to create a new Middle East will continue... but, let's look at the preparatory American steps taken in the past few years to start or to pave the way to start changing the Middle East into a new Middle East, more moderate, less restless and more loyal to the United States. So, the war in Afghanistan did not achieve a great deal after years ... The Iraqi war succeeded in removing the previous dictatorial system, but it did not bring a better system ... The ruling system in Libya has become more yielding ... In Sudan, there are attempts at division. Whenever Sudan solves one problem, another problem occurs ... In Palestine, there is internal corruption and division which has weakened the two local political powers and has caused the Palestinian people to lose confidence in both ... And in Lebanon, an American retrogression, which might be temporary, has paralyzed the Lebanese for two years and occupied them with recovering from the destruction caused by the war [with Israel] which America supported ... In Syria, [the Americans] opened doors to calm it down, and tempted it to sever its relations with their [the Americans'] enemy, Iran ... As for Iran, it forms the biggest problem which hinders the implementation of the new Middle East plan. The Iranians try to gain time by postponing negotiations regarding the nuclear file ... As for Turkey...the Americans tried to satisfy it under the pretext of maintaining its secular system...they deal with it carefully now but their [military] bases are ready there to implement any plan [the Americans] want ... It seems that the Americans are not happy with any of the current

systems in the Middle East, whether these systems are secular, revolutionary, religious or even moderate and upon which it can rely in implementing its plan. And its previous attempts to break the Middle East countries into multiple and weaker ones did not really succeed till now ... As for our status as Palestinians in this new Middle East, we still do not know, will it be above or under the soil?..."

12. Independent Al-Ayyam carries an editorial by Muhammad Yaghi entitled, "On the Idea of Declaring the [Gaza] Strip a Revolutionary Region" (8/15): "Every now and then, crazy ideas occur such as 'declaring Gaza a revolutionary region and calling on the United Nations to issue a decision to make Arab and international forces enter the Gaza Strip.' This call means firstly that there are people who are convinced that the conflict is no longer between the Palestinian people and the [Israeli] occupation ... It is a call to make the occupation permanent and to reinstate it in the Gaza Strip instead of getting rid of it. Secondly, this call paves the way to absolving Israeli of its 'siege' on the Gaza Strip and of its daily crimes in the West Bank, such as killing, arresting, closing

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[checkpoints and borders] and establishing settlements ... Thirdly, it is a call to cancel the Palestinian national movement because it cannot be 'national' when it throws away half of its people and part of its land for which it has fought for a long time ... In any case, it is a call that contradicts the reality which says that the main beneficiary of the division from which our people suffer is the occupation ... The Palestinian people are the ones who choose their leadership of their own free will ... It seems to me [the writer] that the first mistake...was depriving the Palestinian people of their right to be ruled by Hamas ... The solution is to enable the Palestinian people and empower them and give them confidence to overcome this crisis ... This can be done if the [well-known and traditionally-appointed] leaders retire, and the [Palestinian] national factions select entirely new leaderships..."

WALLES